

Montana Sportsmen ALLIANCE

Voice of Reason on Montana Fish and Wildlife Issues

To the Senate Fish & Game Committee:

RE: SB-397 Establishing provisional hunting seasons for certain large predators

POSITION: Montana Sportsmen's Alliance hereby goes on record OPPOSING this bill based on the following reasons:

- Running hounds in Grizzly country, which is most of western Montana, will result in Grizzly bear, dog encounters. Grizzly bears don't tree and the result will lead to dead dogs, and mad houndsman. Dogs can't tell the difference in bear types.
- Running bears with dogs in the fall during elk/deer seasons aren't compatible.
- Bear's habituated to artificial food sources in populated regions leads to more bear problems. Studies in Wisconsin show increased bear populations from bait.
- We currently euthanize bears that are habituated to human foods for good reason. A fed bear is a dead bear!
- Grizzly bears would also become habituated at these sites, further threatening public safety and necessitating their removal from the population. People who unknowingly encounter bait sites are at risk of serious injury from a black or grizzly bear.
- New bear regulations instituted in 2010 have led to record bear harvests in the past 2 years. New wolf regulations haven't had a chance to show results. New MT lion season structures have been put in place, with an emphasis on reducing lion populations. Quotas are being filled.
- There's no scientific proof that these declines are attributed solely to predators.
- This bill could very possibly have a negative impact on delisting the grizzly.

Once again we would like to state our OPPOSITION for HB-397

Montana Sportsmen Alliance Leadership Group

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Comments on the use of hounds and baiting to hunt black bears.

Here are some comments relative to the issue of hounds and baiting in harvesting black bears. In essence, there are no good reasons why either are necessary or should be allowed.

1. **Public Perceptions.** Most members of the general public perceive the baiting of bears as unsporting and that it does not constitute fair chase. While some “hunters” may support such a proposal, overall, public support for hunting would diminish. To non-hunters, this would be further evidence that hunters are lazy and unethical. The use of hounds is also viewed by many to be unethical. Anti-hunting organizations frequently use videos showing the shooting of bears in trees as proof that all hunting is unethical and barbaric.
2. **Public Safety.** We currently euthanize bears that are habituated to human foods for good reason. To alter that and say it is OK for hunters to bait bears is clearly hypocritical and would give the public the impression that it is OK for everyone to feed bears. Problem situations involving habituated bears would increase. Grizzly bears would also become habituated at these sites, further threatening public safety and necessitating their removal from the population. Members of the public who unknowingly encounter bait sites are at risk of serious injury from a black or grizzly bear.
3. **Bear Reproduction.** Proponents of baiting often cite its use as a tool to reduce total bear numbers. However, prolonged and extensive baiting can actually increase bear numbers. In essence, it becomes supplemental feeding. Wisconsin is a good example, where baiting begins in April and there is no limit on the number of bait sites or the type of bait used. Bear numbers are currently at record levels in that state. Research has clearly shown that reproductive success in bears is closely tied to accumulated fat within females. An increase in calories results in an increase in cub production, greater litter frequencies, and earlier ages of reproduction.
4. **Bear Health.** Most states and provinces that currently allow baiting allow the use of human foods that are high in processed sugar (e.g. doughnuts, granola bars, gummy bears, etc.). While not aware of any studies addressing this issue, one would think there would eventually be issues with tooth decay, heart disease, etc. Serious health issues have been clearly identified in the feeding of these types of foods to domestic dogs, which are bears closest relatives. Again, the practice of feeding bears large quantities of these types of foods raises serious ethical questions.
5. **Cub Orphaning.** Proponents often cite baiting as a tool to reduce the taking of females with cubs. However, research in Minnesota by Lynn Rogers in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s showed that females with cubs often stashed or hid their

cubs when entering areas with artificial foods such as garbage dumps or bait sites. He believes they did this in response to other bears that would likely be at these sites, especially large males that might kill their cubs. Hunters utilizing hounds and shooting bears from trees will undoubtedly have a very difficult time discerning lactating females. It is doubtful the cubs will always be with the mother when they are pursued, especially during the spring season. Montana's current hunting season structure in which bears are observed behaving naturally prior to being shot offers a much greater opportunity to observe cubs than either baiting or hounds.

6. Separation of Family Groups. The use of hounds during the spring season would invariably result in the separation of cubs and mothers. Young cubs failing to rejoin their mothers will die. Females with cubs are already severely stressed due to lactation requirements. Pursuit by hounds will only stress them further.
7. Hunter Safety/Grizzly Mortalities. Hunters pursuing black bears with hounds are at very high risk of cornering a grizzly or even a family group of grizzlies. This situation could quickly spiral out of control as the hunters try to pull off their dogs. They could easily be forced to kill a grizzly to protect themselves and/or their dogs. Frightened dogs may run back to their owners for protection with a grizzly in hot pursuit. This recently happened near Trego and resulted in a severely wounded grizzly.
8. The Use of Bait and Hounds is Unnecessary. Black bear hunters in Montana currently enjoy one of the longest hunting seasons in any of the states or provinces, with both spring and fall seasons available. Even without the use of bait or hounds, research has shown that the current hunting season structure in Montana has the potential to seriously impact total black bear numbers. This is due to the fact that the reproductive rate of black bears in Montana is quite low, with females failing to mature and produce cubs until they are 5 or 6 years old. Poor berry crops may severely restrict cub production for several consecutive years. Hunters wishing to be more successful have other tools they can try, such as the use of predator calls. The use of a predator call is far more conducive to controlling bears around private land and residences than hounds, nor does it create habituated bears like baiting. Also, it allows hunters to more easily discern females with cubs than either hounds or baiting.

Black Bear Harvest Trends in Region Two, 1985 - 2011

Year	Annual Harvest Classification				% Females in Harvest	% Males in Harvest	Seasonal Harvest		Median Age of Harvested Black Bear ^b	
	Unk.	Male	Female	Total			Spring	Fall	Male	Female
1985	2	163	106	271	39	60	117	154	4.0	4.0
1986	3	159	128	290	44	55	159	131	3.0	5.0
1987	0	156	87	243	36	64	100	143	4.0	4.0
1988	0	150	98	248	40	60	131	117	4.0	4.0
1989	1	146	83	230	36	63	80	150	3.0	4.0
1990	0	160	95	255	37	63	112	143	3.0	5.0
1991	1	151	72	224	32	67	97	127	3.0	5.0
1992	1	157	99	257	39	61	105	152	3.0	4.0
1993	0	144	85	229	37	63	99	130	3.0	4.0
1994 ^c	1	146	76	223	34	65	72	151	3.0	4.5
1995	0	155	88	243	36	64	70	173	3.0	3.0
1996	0	122	72	194	37	63	72	122	3.0	4.5
1997	1	144	76	221	34	65	57	164	3.0	3.0
1998	0	188	77	265	29	71	69	196	3.0	4.0
1999	0	148	78	226	35	65	80	146	3.0	4.5
2000	0	165	73	238	31	69	100	138	4.0	4.0
2001	1	122	76	199	38	61	88	111	3.0	5.0
2002	0	163	82	245	33	67	74	171	3.0	4.0
2003	0	170	86	256	34	66	100	156	3.0	4.0
2004	1	192	112	305	37	63	104	201	4.0	5.0
2005	0	162	85	247	34	66	120	127	3.0	4.0
2006	0	141	67	208	32	68	85	123	4.0	4.0
2007	0	201	81	282	29	71	90	192	3.0	3.0
2008	0	159	72	231	31	69	64	167	3.0	4.0
2009	0	170	74	244	30	70	73	171	3.0	4.0
2010 ^d	0	217	119	336	35	65	136	200	4.0	4.0
2011	0	221	137	358	38	62	158	200	^a	^a

^a Data unavailable.

^b Age estimated by analysis of tooth cementum layers. Teeth were not available for every bear harvested.

^c Beginning in '94, spring season shortened to 15 April - 15 May for BMUs 108, 280 & 290.

^d Beginning in '10, spring season extended to 31 May for BMUs 200, 280 & 290. BMU 200 established in 2010, previously portion of BMU 108.

Vito Quatraro

From: Frey, Kevin [KFrey@mt.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, June 07, 2011 10:55 AM
To: 'vrq@montana.com'
Subject: black bear harvest info.....

Vito,

As per our phone conversation last week discussing black bear season dates, the following will hopefully provide you with some worthwhile information.

Historically, black season dates has varied greatly in many districts throughout the state. Statewide, there is a variance in season dates and types for management reasons. In Region 3, there has been a more recent effort to make the dates more consistent for the public and legal/enforcement issues while still considering the biological management of the species. The current season date structure was discussed and agreed upon at regional wildlife/enforcement meetings.

I went through my records and the MFWP Black Bear DNA project and the following information is from the 2011 Final Report of Black Bear Harvest by R Mace & T Chilton.

MT's black bear harvest project was compared to numerous black bear research projects around the country. Black bear mortality rates do vary, but sustainability limits of mortalities have been determined to be similar in most black bear populations.

The hunter harvest black bear mortality rate in MT is near the limit of sustainability. Under responsible biological management, black bear sustainable mortality has to include hunting harvest and non-hunting (management removals, road-kill, etc) mortalities.

Mace & Chilton used three techniques to determine MTs harvest rate.

1. DNA mark-recapture method.
2. Statistical model of MT historic harvest records.
3. Sample of radio-collared black bears in the Swan River Valley.

Methods 1. & 2. - Gave the same results of 10% harvest of males and 4% harvest of females.

Method 3. - Showed 9% harvest of males and 6% harvest of females.

Interestingly, using DNA method of same Swan population analysis showed a 1.8% of males and 4.4% of females.

Other research studies have shown that black bear populations could sustain a 14.2% to 15.9% mortality. It is estimated that non-hunting bear mortalities may well exceed 10% in MT. The radio'd Swan bears had a non-hunting mortality rate of 6%. In an additive mortality (harvest & all other causes) estimate, MT may exceed 15% in many areas of the state. In MT, if looking at the population in an average of harvest age (6 yrs) and cub production (2.08), black bear populations could be expected to decline if mortality rate was >16%. Quote from DNA study report - ".... little decision space for population managers to increase black bear harvest above current levels anywhere in Montana." Due to fracture habitat, it was recommended even with BMU 319's lower harvest numbers, a more conservative approach is warranted. Also, a need to monitor non-hunting mortalities to determine if total mortality is within biological limits.

*MT's black bear density per 100 sq kilometers is between 8 and 18 bears.

*Estimated population of BMU 319 (Bridgers) = 145.

*Estimated population of BMU 341 (Gallatin, Yellowstone & portion of Madison) = 617.

*Estimated population of BMU 317 (Gravelly, Snowcrest, etc) = 428.

*BMUs 341 & 317 close on June 15. BMU 319 closes on May 31.

Questions: Why does the Bridgers or BMU 319 close earlier (May 31)? Can the BMU areas all open and close on the same date?

Answer: With the average earlier emergence and hunter accessibility into bear habitat, the historic and current population estimate, considered with total mortality, BMU 319's bear population may not be able to sustain additive mortalities by extending the spring black bear season. Extended seasons in accessible habitat, increases overall bear mortality and the probability of increased female (+cubs) mortalities.

In BMUs (317,319,341) the trend for adult female harvest has been declining slowly. This is good. In these three BMUs, hunting harvest female black bear mortality is currently between 35% and 40% (BMU 319). The management criterion for Montana is <40% harvest of females. We are just at that criteria edge and need to maintain it there.

Recently in the past week, we (R3) have had hunters kill several females with cubs of the year. The longer the season is open and vegetation increases, the odds of mistakenly killing a female bear with cubs increases. Socially, MFWP is questioned as to how we can justify having a spring season, where females with cubs may be killed. So far, we have been able to defend and maintain a spring black bear season by monitoring mortalities and structuring our seasons to meet management goals to meet black bear mortality limits.

Thank-you for your interest, concerns, and efforts regarding Montana's wildlife.
If you have questions, please call or write.

Kevin Frey
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